

# Death and Life in Five Year Slices

How do you imagine Death if Death were personified? Terry Pratchett, in his Discworld stories, made Death be a version of the classic Grim Reaper. The Norse mythology described Death as a young woman whose face was corpse-like on one side and beautiful on the opposite side. Perhaps Death could be imagined as a great energy sucking machine which represents the social conditions of living on under the rule of aristos and oligarchs, lords and mobsters, commissars and companies, the buck and the quid. The continuing clutch of Rome-Egypt-Phoenicia-Britannia-Babylon.

In the 1990s I once attended a protest march through Plymouth, protesting against live exports of animals, and I was accompanied along the march by Jenny Dunster, a young goth from Bude. Jenny had recently moved from Bude to Exeter. She was very pretty and dressed in black and tatters which made her look exactly like Neil Gaiman's Death character from the Sandman comics. In fact Jenny looked so much like that particular version of Death that she might've just walked out of the comic book page and into the real world. As we walked along through Plymouth in the demonstration she impulsively decided to hold my hand.

I come from a family where there was never very much touching, hugging or holding of hands. In fact Jenny was the first person who had ever held my hand in my entire autistic life and I was slightly weirded out by it. I was 42 and she was about 20-ish. I thought "Oh no! I'm Death's dad!!!" Well done me! Most excellent fool as always! Pierrot and Death in procession.

When you are near Death you expect your life to flash before your eyes and you are surprised by a lot of what flashes. I'm very old now and I look back over my life and sometimes think I can see number sequences in the years.

The machine of the Empire slices time and drains power.

From the first five years (1953 to 1958) I can remember chocolate, the birth of my sister when I was three, learning to read when I was four, going shopping on a Saturday with my mum and getting lost in Woolworths which led to my mum subsequently attaching a harness to me to stop me from wandering off. Carrying shopping bags and holding my hand would've, presumably, been too difficult to do at the same time. I remember starting school at five years old and being praised as a little genius for my reading ability. I remember falling down face first onto some broken glass at four years old and getting a scar on my cheek

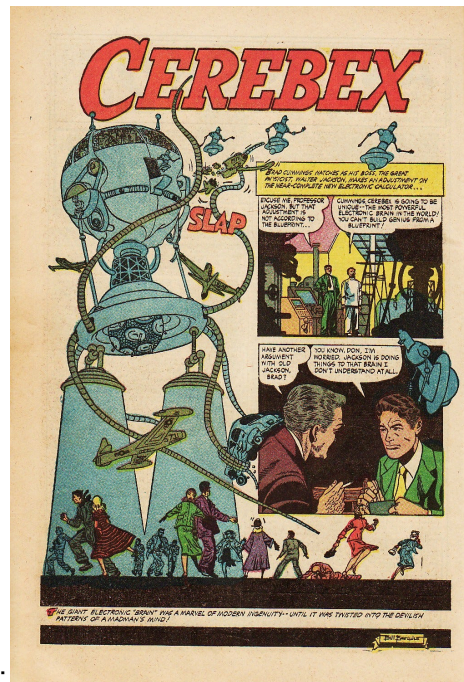
which has been with me for the rest of my life and which makes me look as though I've been punished by an irate underworld bookie for failing to pay back a loan.

From the second five years (1958 to 1963) I can remember being given speech therapy which reduced my stutter down to a hesitational speech pattern which resembles Winston Churchill announcing that we are going to "Fight them..... mmm .....on the beaches". Throughout my life since then people have commented on the "hiatus", the "pregnant pause" or "the gap" and some people have assumed that my hesitations were somehow an insult. I also remember being taken for ultraviolet light therapy because I was pigeon chested and "the runt of the litter" and some sort of freak who needed therapy to make my chest be "normal". I remember being told to help a boy named Andrew because he was the slowest in class and I was the brightest. I remember how that bit of helping somebody led to us both getting disqualified from the eleven plus when he mistakenly turned around and asked me to help him. I remember going each Saturday to buy comics and each Sunday to Methodist Church Sunday School. I remember being given an overdose of nitrous oxide gas at the dentist's surgery and being traumatised for a long while afterwards.

From the third five years of my life (1963 to 1968) I can remember doing a paper round seven days a week and spending the money on comics. I can remember going to secondary school in North Cheam and being placed in the "B" stream of the streaming system. I can remember being in class "1B" and class "2B" and then being dropped down at thirteen to class "3C" and subsequently class "4C" and then "5C". I can remember being reclassified from a very bright child to a child who was either stupid or "lazy". This is not an unusual experience for an autistic child in the 1960s. The educational system of those times didn't know what to make of us. I can remember joining the Air Training Corps at 13 and doing a lot of marching and rifle drill. I can remember liking very silly jokes which, as far as I knew, were based on meaninglessness and comedy characters with silly names. I can remember an ATC corporal shouting at me "Are you normal?" to which I replied "Yes corporal!" and he said "Then why don't you march normally?" Everything around me in my life kept giving me the same message: "I was not normal" that was what life was telling me. I can remember the minister at the Methodist Church telling me to go away and never to come to the Methodist Church ever again and not giving me any reason for it. I remember going on summer camp with the ATC to RAF Chivenor in Devon. I remember leaving school and starting in a job. I remember the death of my dad. I remember the forced destruction of the house I'd grown up in and also the destruction of the entire street by the expanded bloody London council. I remember Neil Armstrong walking on the moon. I remember The Beatles breaking up. I remember being in a state of shock.

From the fourth five years of my life (1968 to 1973) I remember working as an office boy for a Fleet Street office full of Australian journalists and reading a lot of books and a lot of comics. I remember going through puberty at 16, a few months after leaving school and considerably later than other kids of the same generation. Another reason to feel like a freak. I remember being arrested for telling a policeman that he was wearing the uniform of a racist, fascist organisation. I remember drawing a lot of cartoons and trying to get started on becoming a writer. I remember going to the comic convention in the Waverley Hotel in on this

London and having an excited conversation with some bloke about the artwork of Bill Benulis



on this comic strip:

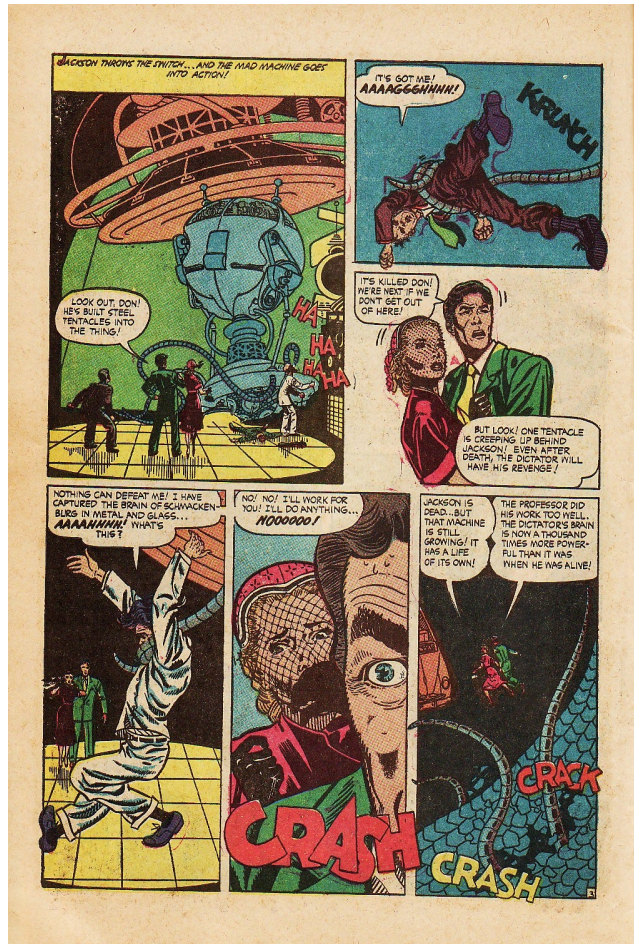


We were looking at the way he drew details.

Details like the woman's veil or the man's trouser leg. "Wow, what a trouser leg!" This artwork was so good it made my brain feel intoxicated. Also from the fourth five year slice of my life I remember leaving the office boy job and travelling around England a bit to begin to know the way people live and how the country works. I remember going to Glastonbury for



the first time (Glastonbury town not the festival). I remember meeting Jim Baggins and starting to collaborate on a book. I remember meeting Wendy, my first girlfriend, and being driven into terrible depression and almost death at nineteen. I remember reaching my twentieth birthday in 1973 and thinking that not being a teenager anymore was some sort of terrible milestone which meant I might have to start being a grown-up. Luckily I was wrong about that and I have managed to avoid being a grown-up for seven decades.



From the fifth five years of my life (1973 to 1978) I remember trying to set up an alternative information centre in North London, being brainwashed by a pseudo-religious cult called the Emin, working in jobs and giving the Emin almost all of my wages. The Emin stopped me from writing and drawing by making me believe that the only writing and drawing of any importance was something called "essence art". When I asked how to do this so-called "essence art" no-one would tell me. So I was stuck and blocked until I got away from them eventually and I realised that they were talking rubbish and that personality is far better than essence. Then I was able to write and draw again.

From the sixth five years of my life (1978 to 1983) I remember getting away from the Emin in 1980. I remember returning to live in Glastonbury again in 1983.

From the seventh five years of my life (1983 to 1988) I remember working for Children's World, coping with a traumatic murder situation in the flats at 7a and then returning to London to study on the Sesame course at the Central School of Speech and Drama.



From the eighth five years of my life (1988 to 1993) I remember working at animal sanctuaries and then starting my art degree course at Plymouth University (in Exeter).

From the ninth five years of my life (1993 to 1998) I remember completing my degree, working with small children at Stoke Hill Pre-School, working as an I.T. person at Internet Express, hunt sabbing, protesting, doing little bits of writing and painting. Surfing the Information Super-Highway.

From the tenth five years of my life (1998 to 2003) I was taken and connected to a machine which sucked. The rubber tubes were connected to each of my arms, legs and neck and the sucking action of the machine syphoned away my blood on a day-by-day basis. I remember working in increasingly monotonous jobs and living in slummy conditions while getting older and tired-er as my parents had done before me. Making little videos for YouTube.

From the eleventh five years of my life (2003 to 2008) there was more of the same. The machine, whose name was Leviathan, was carefully set to take no more than the amount needed to sap my strength. Started needing reading glasses. Reading a lot of books, listening to podcasts and audiobooks.

From the twelfth five years of my life (2008 to 2013) there was, once again, more of the same. I grow older and weaker. My brain is slowing down and my body needs more sleep. Bought an electric guitar. Watching more TV than previously.

From the thirteenth five years of my life (2013 to 2018) there was yet more of the same until reaching retirement age at in 2018. Bought a midi keyboard. The machine is going to let me go for a time.

From the fourteenth five years of my life (2018 to 2023) I remember the great happiness of not needing to go to some stupid job for some stupid employer anymore. I remember the sense of freedom from being a wage slave. I remember the joy of sleeping for as long as I needed to so that I could begin to feel like a human being again. So that I could start to be creative again. To write, to draw, to paint, to play the guitar, to experiment with technology and sound art, with synths and samplers to make videos for YouTube and digital art to share on social media. Did a bit of travelling but then the Covid lock-downs hampered that.

I'm currently in the next bit of my life (2023 to the present and to 2028 if I don't die before then). I'm writing a lot and self-publishing on Substack. Also making visual art and audio art.

According to a fiction story that I wrote a little while back I will be living in Greenland in 2053 at the age of 100. I'm such an optimist!

